



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

Oahu 586-4586, Maui 984-8213, Hilo 933-0912,
Kona 322-4877, Kauai 241-3563

Cryptosporidiosis

What is cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is caused by a very small intestinal parasite, *Cryptosporidium*. It is a common cause of diarrhea worldwide and can be a severe problem for people with weak immune systems.

How do you get it?

Cryptosporidiosis is spread by eating food or drinking water contaminated with stool from infected animals and humans. The disease can be spread person-to-person, animal-to-person, and by contaminated food. It is commonly spread through swimming pools. The eggs of the parasite can stay alive outside the body for 2 to 6 months in moist settings.

What are the symptoms of cryptosporidiosis?

The major symptoms are stomach cramping and watery diarrhea. Less commonly, nausea, vomiting, and mild fever may also occur.

When do the symptoms start?

The symptoms usually start about 7 days after exposure to the parasite, but they can begin from 1 to 12 days after exposure.

What is the treatment for cryptosporidiosis?

There is no medicine to treat cryptosporidiosis, but you should make sure that a person with this illness drinks plenty fluids to replace what is lost in diarrhea. The illness usually passes in 3 to 7 days in most people. However, the infection can be serious, even life threatening when it occurs in persons whose immune systems are weakened by medical treatment or chronic disease such as cancer or the HIV virus that causes AIDS.

Should a person with cryptosporidiosis stay home from school or work?

Any child with diarrhea should stay out of day care until the diarrhea stops. Also, people with diarrhea who work as food handlers or take direct care of patients should stay home from work until well. Infected people with no symptoms who work as food handlers, child-care and health care workers, should get permission from their doctor or the Health Department before returning to work. A person with cryptosporidiosis may be able to spread the disease for several weeks after the symptoms have gone away. Therefore, careful hand washing is very important upon return to work.

How can you keep from getting it?

There is no vaccine to prevent cryptosporidiosis.

Wash your hands carefully after using the toilet, after changing diapers, after handling animals, and before eating or making food. After changing diapers, wash the child's hands also.

Dispose of human and animal waste promptly and carefully.

Avoid drinking untreated water from ponds, lakes, streams, swimming pools, hot tubs or fountains. If you must drink untreated water, first bring it to a rolling boil for at least 1 minute.

Cryptosporidium can live for days in swimming pools even with good chlorine levels.

For more information, see the CDC's website at http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/cryptosporidiosis/factsht_cryptosporidiosis.htm